



# Canada - United States Cooperation in the Salish Sea

2025-2028 Action Plan

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## Introduction: Building on Twenty-Five Years of International Cooperation

The [Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound Ecosystem](#) (“SoC”) was signed by the Administrator of the United States (U.S.) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)<sup>1</sup> in January 2000. The SoC outlines a shared vision for the health of the transboundary ecosystem now widely known as the Salish Sea, comprising Puget Sound, the Strait of Georgia, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, as well as the watersheds that surround and drain into them.<sup>2</sup> The SoC commits the two agencies to work cooperatively on this common vision for the ecosystem.

With this Joint Statement of Cooperation, we are acting on the two federal governments’ unique responsibilities to address the transboundary and global environmental challenges confronting the future of the ecosystem. But we cannot fulfill our shared vision of a healthy, sustainable ecosystem on our own. All residents of the region in Canada and in the United States of America, and all levels of their governments, share responsibility for protecting and enhancing the integrity and viability of the ecosystem, so that this special place can be enjoyed by present and future generations ([Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound Ecosystem](#), 2000).

The Salish Sea bioregion encompasses 102,727 square kilometers, or 39,663 square miles, of marine waters and watersheds in British Columbia and Washington State.<sup>3</sup> Dotted by more than 500 named islands, the highly productive inland marine waters of the Salish Sea support a diversity of species, including large numbers of marine birds and marine mammals such as seals, sea lions, and Southern Resident Killer Whales. Upland and coastal watersheds that drain to the Salish Sea provide habitat for freshwater and anadromous species, including Pacific Salmon.

These rich land and seascapes have been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The SoC recognizes and honours the traditional knowledge and values of the Indigenous Peoples of the Georgia Basin and of Puget Sound and commits to working with their representatives in an atmosphere of mutual respect to preserve and protect the region.

Today, approximately 9 million people live within the Salish Sea ecosystem. Projections envision an increase to over 12 million by the year 2045,<sup>4</sup> placing new pressures and cumulative effects on the region.<sup>5</sup> The SoC’s vision of a healthy, sustainable ecosystem continues to call for shared responsibility from all residents and all levels of government.

Under the SoC, ECCC and EPA co-chair a Working Group that develops and updates Action Plans to achieve SoC goals. The Working Group also includes advisory members from organizations which, while not parties to the joint SoC, can help effectively implement its goals. Advisory members currently represent the following organizations: Coast Salish Gathering Steering Committee; British Columbia Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship; British Columbia Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy; Washington State Department of Ecology; Puget Sound Partnership; the Northwest Straits Commission; and the Salish Sea Institute at Western Washington University.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2000, Environment and Climate Change Canada was known as Environment Canada. [Go back.](#)

<sup>2</sup> See [Geographical Names Board of Canada](#) and U.S. Board on Geographic Names, as cited by the [U.S. Geological Survey](#). For the purpose of [Puget Sound Geographic Program funding](#), EPA states that the ‘greater Puget Sound basin is defined as all watersheds draining to the U.S. waters of Puget Sound, southern Georgia Basin, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.’ ECCC’s former [Georgia Basin Action Plan](#) stated that the Georgia Basin is comprised of the Strait of Georgia, part of an inland sea which encompasses Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca as well as the lands and watersheds that surround and drain into the Strait. [Go back.](#)

<sup>3</sup> See [Salish Sea Atlas](#), Aquila Flower, 2020. [Go back.](#)

<sup>4</sup> ECCC calculations based on data obtained from [Statistics Canada Census of Population 2021](#), [BC Statistics](#), and [Washington State Office of Financial Management](#), last updated in 2024. [Go back.](#)

<sup>5</sup> The term “cumulative effects” generally refers to the combined effects from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future activities and natural processes. Specific definitions vary among different parties and under different legislation and policies, but the term generally refers to effects that may be individually minor, but collectively significant. Effects can be adverse (for example, deteriorated water quality in a regional river) or positive (e.g., socioeconomic benefits to a local community) ([About cumulative effects - Canada.ca](#)). [Go back.](#)

With this Action Plan for 2025-2028, ECCC and EPA reaffirm and renew the intentions of the SoC through the six joint Priority Action Items (PAIs) for 2025-2028 in the table at the end of this document. As described below, these PAIs build from results achieved during the 2021-2024 Action Plan and lay paths for ongoing collaboration.

## Supporting Transboundary Knowledge Exchange

Foundational to the SoC is the understanding of the Salish Sea as a part of an integrated ecosystem that spans the international border, and a commitment to share knowledge and information across the border to inform priorities and effective cooperation.

The biennial Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC) (previously the *Future of the Basin Conference*), proposed in the original SoC to monitor progress and build consensus around emerging challenges, grew to become one of the largest, most comprehensive ecosystem conferences in the region. More than 2,400 participants attended the last conference, held virtually in 2022. The SoC Working Group has supported the Conference materially and by participating in the Executive and Program Committees, as well as presenting within the Conference to explore and foster progress across all PAIs. Examples of SoC member-led sessions from 2022 include: “[Reporting on the Health of the Salish Sea via transboundary ecosystem indicators: Reflecting on twenty years and mobilizing for the future](#)” and “[ECCC-EPA Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Georgia Basin-Puget Sound Ecosystem: A 20-Year Retrospective Look](#).”

SoC Working Group members are now exploring approaches for supporting the long-term sustainability of the SSEC, which has grown beyond its original model, and are committed to the renewal of the conference.

In addition to the SSEC, the SoC Working Group is engaged in other regional forums for transboundary knowledge exchange. For example, EPA and ECCC participated in the Salish Sea Symposium hosted by Canada’s Ocean Protections Plan in January 2024, bringing together a number of SoC Working Group members. Regular meetings of the SoC Working Group are also key knowledge-sharing opportunities to explore and highlight issues related to the PAIs. In recent years we have brought special presentations from leading scientists to the SoC Working Group on topics such as transboundary marine birds and climate change in the Salish Sea.

For 2025-2028, we reaffirm our commitment to **support the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference and other regional forums for transboundary knowledge exchange and collaboration (PAI 1).**<sup>6</sup>

## Developing and Maintaining Ecosystem Health Indicators & Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report

Since 2002, ECCC and EPA have collaborated to co-produce the transboundary [Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report](#), which describes trends in indicators that can help identify priorities for action across the Salish Sea ecosystem. By reporting to the public on the health of the shared ecosystem, this work aligns with commitments in the SoC to share scientific information on the ecosystem and develop joint research initiatives. The current suite of indicators (see [Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report](#)) are intended to help support and inform stewardship decisions by showing progress in sustainably managing the Salish Sea ecosystem, where conditions are declining, and where course corrections are needed. In the [2020 update](#), a number of these interconnected environmental indicators show declining trends, reinforcing a need for shared action.

Under the 2021-2024 Action Plan, updated indicators were presented at SSEC in 2022 and other scientific conferences. EPA and ECCC have also worked with partners, including the Puget Sound Partnership and Western Washington University’s Salish Sea Institute, to develop new indicators on climate change, and have begun work to develop new indicators on land cover change.

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<sup>6</sup> Support may include a variety of contributions, including in-kind involvement in organizing and coordinating activities. [Go back](#).

EPA and ECCC have also worked to identify opportunities to expand the indicators to better represent Indigenous knowledge, hosting a pilot webinar engagement session for Indigenous community members based in the northern part of the Salish Sea in March 2022, and commissioning expertise from Northwest Indian College to inform a new narrative framework for the indicators.

For 2025-2028, we reaffirm our commitment to **maintain and further develop the transboundary Salish Sea Ecosystem Health Indicators (PAI 2)**.

## **Sharing Information on Projects With Potential Transboundary Impacts**

During the second decade of the SoC Working Group, advisory members noted a number of large projects proposed for development in the Georgia Basin-Puget Sound ecosystem undergoing environmental review processes. The original SoC recognized that “...residents and organizations in the regions are among the best sources of information on the current challenges facing the ecosystem, and that they should be partners in efforts to shape the future of the region. They should have opportunities for providing input into government planning and decisions, and for participating in activities in their communities.” The SoC Co-Chairs subsequently sought to support a greater level of common understanding of environmental review processes for projects within the Salish Sea region on both sides of the border and engaged with environmental review agencies to present relevant information and updates to the Working Group and at the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference.

Beginning with the 2015-2016 SoC Action Plan, ECCC and EPA have included information sharing on transboundary notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea as a Priority Action Item and standing agenda item for Working Group meetings. Since then, EPA and ECCC Co-Chairs have worked to promote and support proactive information sharing and notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem with potential transboundary effects. Under the 2021-2024 Action Plan, the Co-Chairs have also included updates on project processes in fourteen of the “Sharing Information” email updates to the SoC Working Group and have additionally maintained domestic relationships with respective federal lead agencies to facilitate awareness of projects that could have transboundary impacts within the Salish Sea region.

For 2025-2028, we reaffirm our commitment to **support information sharing activities on environmental and impact assessment processes including early notification for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem (PAI 3)**.

## **Strengthening Transboundary Coordination Mechanisms**

The SoC recognizes the many existing cross-border and other coordination and information-sharing mechanisms and states the intention to “work through these cooperative mechanisms to the fullest extent possible.” Accordingly, three PAIs support transboundary collaborative mechanisms to best advance Salish Sea protection.

### **Tribal-First Nation Transboundary Coordination**

As noted in the introduction, the lands and waters of Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Strait of Georgia have been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. First Nations and Tribes throughout this region are deeply connected by social, cultural, and economic ties that predate the international border. The SoC affirms the importance of Indigenous knowledge, values, and perspectives to efforts to preserve and protect the region and commits ECCC and EPA to work closely with representatives of the Tribes and First Nations of the Puget Sound and Georgia Basin ecosystem.

In the 25 years since the SoC was signed, we have striven to uphold this commitment through a number of avenues and enduring relationships. For example, the SoC Working Group has supported and participated as invited in the Coast Salish Gathering (CSG), which has provided a unique environmental policy forum where Coast Salish Tribal and First Nations governments, state, provincial and federal governments build mutual understanding and discuss strategies to address environmental issues facing our shared Salish Sea region. The SoC Working Group continues its longstanding relationship with the CSG Steering Committee, which participated in all SoC Working Group meetings held during the 2021-2024 Action Plan period.

EPA and ECCC also engage with First Nations and Tribes on the renewal of the Action Plan and are seeking to strengthen relationships and support for Tribes and First Nations to engage in transboundary forums through related work of the two federal agencies in the Salish Sea region. SoC Working Group members also support First Nation and Tribal participation across a number of other regional initiatives, some of which are identified below.

For 2025-2028, we reaffirm our commitment to **support Tribal-First Nation transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms (PAI 4)** and seek to deepen and strengthen support of Indigenous-led transboundary mechanisms and initiatives in the Salish Sea region.

## State, Provincial, and Local Transboundary Coordination

In recognizing the many existing initiatives and relationships in the region, the original SoC also explicitly identified the intention to collaborate with Province of British Columbia and Washington State partners. During the 2021-2024 Action Plan period, the SoC Working Group closely tracked and supported several State, provincial, and local initiatives. Working Group members continued engagement with the British Columbia-Washington Nooksack River Technical Collaboration Group, formed in August 2018 with a three-year mandate to reduce fecal indicator bacteria (fecal bacteria) concentrations in the transboundary Nooksack River watershed. British Columbia and Whatcom Clean Water Partners, including a subset of members of the SoC working group, continue to have open lines of communication and information sharing meetings to improve water quality in the Nooksack watershed. In addition, Washington State and British Columbia provincial agencies have existing processes and mechanisms regarding environmental review notification.<sup>7</sup> These existing processes are also relevant to Action Plan goals relating to environmental review under PAI 3. The SoC Working Group also supported information sharing on the Swift Creek/Sumas Mountain Sediment Management Project.

Another noteworthy example of a collaborative transboundary mechanism with SoC Working Group advisory member involvement is the Nooksack and Sumas Transboundary Flood Initiative (NTFI), established in October 2023. The nine parties to this initiative are: Sumas First Nation (Semá:th), Leq'á:mel First Nation, Matsqui First Nation (Máthxwi), Nooksack Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, City of Abbotsford, Whatcom County, Province of British Columbia, and State of Washington.

For 2025-2028, we reaffirm our commitment to **support State, provincial and local transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms (PAI 5) in the Salish Sea region.**

## Federal Transboundary Coordination

As the original SoC signatories, and with subsequent affirmations of transboundary roles in the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound ecosystem, ECCC and EPA have long been committed to promoting and fostering coordination and information sharing on Salish Sea-related federal initiatives. In support of this commitment, during the 2021-2024 Action Plan period, EPA and ECCC facilitated new relationships between the Canada-U.S. federal families. For example, the SoC Co-Chairs facilitated new cross-agency communication and coordination relating to the science and management of the emerging contaminant 6PPD-q, and convened an initial informal exchange between ECCC and EPA on U.S. and Canadian federal climate change goals, targets, and initiatives relevant to the Salish Sea region.

The Co-Chairs also worked with staff for the U.S. Puget Sound Federal Leadership Task Force (PSFLTF) Action Plan; as a result, the 2022-2026 PSFLTF Action Plan incorporated a “Priority Federal Action” 2.1.9, “Implement the Canada – U.S. Cooperation in the Salish Sea 2021-2024 Action Plan,” which includes the language, “The PSFTF will track, maintain awareness, and focus implementation assistance - as requested by the SoC working group - on commitments made under Salish Sea Action Plan PAI6...”

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<sup>7</sup> An important mechanism is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2003 by the Director of the Washington State Department of Ecology and the Minister and Executive Director of the British Columbia Environmental Assessment Office for the purposes of facilitating information sharing and mutual understanding of the environmental assessment and environmental review laws, policies and processes of each jurisdiction and facilitate full knowledge of changes; and facilitating notification and information exchange regarding major project proposals that are in the vicinity of the other jurisdiction. The MOU can be found at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/environmental-assessments/working-with-other-agencies/eao-mous-and-agreements/eao-memorandum-of-understanding-with-washington-state.pdf>. Go back.

For 2025-2028, we reaffirm our commitment to **foster and encourage coordination and information sharing activities on Salish Sea-related federal initiatives and identify opportunities where U.S. and Canadian federal interests and mechanisms may intersect (PAI 6).**

We note that in addition to efforts under the SoC, EPA and ECCC collaborate in several program areas and with a wide variety of partners within the Salish Sea region, including on regional hazard response agreements and the International Airshed Strategy Coordinating Committee. We also note that 2022 U.S. legislation has strengthened the EPA Puget Sound Recovery National Program Office’s mandate for transboundary Salish Sea coordination.

## Working Group Administration

The previous 2021-2024 Action Plan required adaptation to a changed landscape of engagement throughout and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic. The absence of several longstanding forums for in-person engagement and exchange – the SSEC and CSG – was deeply felt. However, the SoC continued to play a convenor role in support of information sharing. The SoC Working Group held four meetings over the course of the 2021-2024 SoC Action Plan in October 2021, November 2022, June 2023, and May 2024. Between meetings, the EPA and ECCC maintained a “Sharing Information” email series to alert the Working Group to topics of interest; during the 2021-2024 Action Plan period, approximately 40 such emails were sent.

We anticipate maintaining ongoing administrative support for the SoC throughout the new Action Plan period. In general, this shared administrative support includes:

- Planning, convening, facilitating, and reporting on Working Group meetings;
- Leading the development and implementation of Action Plans, including reviewing and evaluating progress on meeting the outputs associated with each PAI;
- Convening special meetings and information-sharing sessions to spotlight topics of priority transboundary interest in the Salish Sea region;
- Identifying and pursuing opportunities to further advance SoC goals and Action Plan PAIs, including as raised by Working Group advisory members, Working Group meeting guests, and SoC Action Plan evaluation and review processes;
- Supporting and mentoring interns and other early-career staff on SoC-related tasks and projects. For example, during the 2021-2024 Action Plan period, an intern under the guidance of the Co-Chairs completed and presented a report on the 20-year history of the SoC; and
- Keeping ECCC and EPA senior leadership informed of key SoC-related developments consistent with the two agencies’ objectives in transboundary Salish Sea ecosystem coordination, and supporting their engagement in SoC-related transboundary forums.

ECCC and EPA commit to adaptively managing the Working Group Terms of Reference, Working Group structure and function, and Priority Action Item commitments, consistent with Tribal trust and treaty mandates, responsibilities, and priorities, and First Nation treaty relationships and reconciliation.

Proposed 2025-2028 Priority Action Item (PAI)	Proposed 2025-2028 Outcomes <sup>8</sup>	Proposed 2025-2028 Outputs <sup>9</sup>
<p>PAI 1: Support for the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC) and other regional forums for transboundary knowledge exchange and collaboration.</p>	<p>Mechanisms for transboundary knowledge exchange and collaboration are fostered and sustained.</p> <p>Indigenous knowledge and leadership are centered in forums for transboundary knowledge exchange.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term organizational and financial sustainability of the SSEC supported.</li> <li>• SoC Working Group (WG) member participation in the SSEC and/or other conferences or workshops.</li> <li>• WG member support for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in the SSEC and/or other conferences or workshops.</li> <li>• Content advancing 2025-2028 Action Plan PAIs included in SSEC and/or other conferences or workshops.</li> </ul>
<p>PAI 2: Maintain and further develop the transboundary Salish Sea Ecosystem Health Indicators.</p>	<p>Updated indicator report contributes to public knowledge and supports adaptive management of relevant goals/targets for health of Salish Sea ecosystem.</p> <p>Continued information sharing and collaboration with transboundary partners and subject matter experts to facilitate integrated understanding of transboundary ecosystem health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicators website updated with current information for existing and new indicators relevant to the goals and objectives of the SoC.</li> <li>• EPA and ECCC, together with WG advisory members, explore processes for applying indicators to inform adaptive management of SoC Action Plan and other Salish Sea work.</li> <li>• EPA &amp; ECCC engagement to expand the suite of indicators (e.g. to include climate and land cover change).</li> <li>• EPA &amp; ECCC engagement to i) expand indicators work to better represent and reflect Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and ii) strengthen links to related regional initiatives, including work describing cumulative effects.</li> <li>• Targeted information-sharing and technical activities to support indicator updates and transboundary scientific collaboration (e.g. joint authorship).</li> </ul>
<p>PAI 3: Support information sharing activities on environmental and impact assessment processes including early notification for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem.</p>	<p>Increased WG understanding of developments in transboundary environmental and impact assessment and notification processes.</p> <p>Increased understanding by WG members' networks of these developments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further promote and support proactive information sharing processes including early notification for projects with potential transboundary effects within Salish Sea region (e.g. convene conversations with lead agencies regarding notification and engagement processes; share information with networks on these processes).</li> <li>• EPA and ECCC, together with WG advisory members, share information and continue to provide periodic updates on environmental and impact assessment review processes and mechanisms (e.g., British Columbia-Washington State MOU on environmental review).</li> <li>• Project Environmental Assessment processes remain a standing agenda item at WG meetings.</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> *Outcomes* may be defined as the result, effect, or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may not necessarily be achievable within an Action Plan period. [Go back.](#)

<sup>9</sup> *Outputs* may be defined as an environmental activity or effort, and/or associated work products, that are produced or provided over a specific period of time. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative. [Go back.](#)

Proposed 2025-2028 Priority Action Item (PAI)	Proposed 2025-2028 Outcomes <sup>8</sup>	Proposed 2025-2028 Outputs <sup>9</sup>
<p>PAI 4: Support Tribal-First Nations transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms.</p>	<p>Tribal and First Nation transboundary coordination &amp; connection on Salish Sea health are supported, consistent with Tribal trust and treaty mandates, responsibilities, and priorities, and First Nation treaty relationships and reconciliation.</p> <p>WG has greater awareness of Tribal and First Nation Salish Sea ecosystem interests and priorities, and WG activities reflect this greater awareness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore options to improve mechanisms for capacity support for Tribal and First Nation transboundary coordination and engagement, including participation in the SOC Working Group and Action Plan.</li> <li>• Continued active engagement by Coast Salish Gathering Steering Committee.</li> <li>• WG members participate and engage as invited in the Coast Salish Gathering and other key Tribal-First Nation coordination and information sharing forums.</li> </ul>
<p>PAI 5: Support State, provincial and local transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms.</p>	<p>State, provincial and local mechanisms and efforts that advance critical transboundary water quality and ecosystem health issues in border watersheds are supported by WG members where appropriate.</p> <p>The landscape of transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms is better understood by entities with transboundary needs and interests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued updates by relevant WG members on the Swift Creek/Sumas Mountain Sediment Management Project including as a standing agenda item at WG meetings.</li> <li>• ECCC and EPA support other State, provincial, and local transboundary mechanisms (e.g., Puget Sound Management Conference forums like the Informal Transboundary Caucus) on shared interests and opportunities for cooperation.</li> <li>• WG members support targeted information sharing on emerging issues and collaboration to address shared challenges.</li> <li>• WG members share information within their networks about cooperative mechanisms for addressing transboundary issues.</li> </ul>
<p>PAI 6: Foster and encourage coordination and information sharing activities on Salish Sea-related federal initiatives; identify opportunities where U.S. and Canadian federal interests and mechanisms may intersect.</p>	<p>WG members and their stakeholders are well informed of federal Salish Sea protection initiatives.</p> <p>Potential areas for transboundary collaboration are identified and targeted collaborations for emerging issues is encouraged.</p> <p>Transboundary thinking is fostered and encouraged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webinar(s) or other information sharing activities on key federal initiatives (e.g., Oceans Protection Plan-Salish Sea Strategy, Puget Sound Federal Leadership Task Force Action Plan).</li> <li>• Support and facilitate transboundary engagement among Federal partners to review and discuss shared goals, interests and progress, including on ecosystem science and protection, climate change, and other environmental issues.</li> <li>• Build awareness of and connection with other transboundary ecosystem governance initiatives and models as they relate to current SoC and federal roles.</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to support capacity development for next generation of transboundary champions (e.g., student and youth internship programs) and share information with WG.</li> </ul>

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**Anna**

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